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Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Human resources management

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on senior-level appointments in the United Nations and its programmes and funds

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Senior-level appointments in the United Nations and its programmes and funds" (JIU/REP/2000/3) (A/55/423).

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Comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Senior-level appointments in the United Nations and its programmes and funds"

I. General comments

1. In accordance with article 11 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the Secretary-General is providing his comments on the report on senior-level appointments in the United Nations and its programmes and funds. While the Secretary-General welcomes this report, as he does all reports of JIU, it should be noted that this subject has already been the focus of several JIU reports, as indicated in paragraphs 1 to 8 of its report.

II. Comments on the recommendations

2. In seeking to put in place new modalities for the appointment of senior-level officials, the report must not distract from the fact that Member States appoint the Secretary-General as the Organization's Chief Administrative Officer. Performance of this function requires the delegation of genuine and unencumbered decision-making authority. The recommendation that consultations with Member States be a requisite part of the selection process bears merit. However, the possibility of unnecessary delays in appointments as a result of protracted consultations, together with the prospect of further politicization of the issue, might make such a process too cumbersome and render the exercise less beneficial than intended.

3. Notwithstanding that, the Secretary-General has expressed his determination to seek the widest possible spectrum of views to ensure that his appointments are of the highest calibre and that the Organization continues to benefit from consultation with Member States in such appointments.

4. The report appears to show ambivalence towards some of the key tenets of the international civil service concept as outlined in Article 100 of the Charter of the United Nations. This is manifest, for example, in the suggestion that all Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General appointments are "political" and that, by implication, they are neither merit-based nor transparent. The recommendation that all senior staff, including those in the Director-level grades, be given fixed-term contracts and that Member States be consulted in their appointment and/or extension, is similarly flawed.

A. Appointments of top-echelon officials

Recommendation I

"The Secretary-General, prior to making appointments at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General, should consult thereon with Member States on a broader basis."

5. The Secretary-General believes that the institutionalization of consultations implied in the recommendation would result in a protracted procedure without necessarily providing additional advice beyond that which is already obtained through the regular informal consultations he conducts. When deciding on appointments at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General, the Secretary-General consistently takes into account qualifications, skills and experience, as well as the need to have the broadest possible geographical distribution and gender balance in such positions.

Recommendation II

"The General Assembly may wish to decide that staff regulation 4.5 be amended to read as follows:

" 'Regulation 4.5:

" '(a) The Deputy Secretary-General shall be appointed in the manner provided for in General Assembly resolution 52/12 B of 19 December 1997, section A, paragraph 2, for a term of office which will not exceed that of the Secretary-General;

" '(b) The Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services shall be appointed in the manner provided for in General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, paragraph 5 (b) (ii), for one fixed term of five years without possibility of renewal;

" '(c) Appointment of Under-Secretaries-General and of Assistant Secretaries-General shall normally be for an initial period of up to five years, subject to prolongation or renewal so that the total term of office should not exceed ten years;

" '(d) Other staff members shall be granted either permanent or temporary appointments under such terms and conditions consistent with the present Regulations as the Secretary-General may prescribe;

" '(e) The Secretary-General shall prescribe which staff members are eligible for permanent appointments. The probationary period for granting or confirming a permanent appointment shall normally not exceed two years, provided that in individual cases the Secretary-General may extend the probationary period for not more than one additional year.' "

6. This recommendation proposes extensive amendments to staff regulation 4.5 and seems to go completely against repeated adjurations by the General Assembly to simplify the Staff Regulations and Rules.

7. The specific conditions contained in General Assembly resolutions 52/12 B and 48/218 B for the appointment of the Deputy Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services do not need to be referred to specifically, as those resolutions clearly stand alone and limit, to that extent, the authority of the Secretary-General.

8. With regard to subparagraph (c) of the proposed amendment to regulation 4.5 above, the Secretary-General heeds the provisions of General Assembly resolution 45/239 A of 21 December 1990, section I, paragraph 7, in which the Assembly requested him not to extend, as a rule, the service of under-secretaries-general and assistant secretaries-general for a period exceeding ten years. To respond to all of the aspects of this recommendation, staff regulation 4.5 (a) would need to be amended as follows:

"Appointment of officials at the Assistant Secretary-General level and above shall normally be for an initial period of up to five years, subject to prolongation or renewal. The total duration of such an appointment at the same level shall normally not exceed ten years."

9. With regard to subparagraph (d), the Secretary-General advises JIU that he is currently undertaking a complete review of the contractual arrangements available for the Secretariat. This review includes comprehensive discussions with the staff of the Organization and with Member States. An initial overview of the issues involved is contained in his report to the General Assembly on human resources management reform (A/55/253 and Corr.1), as are his intentions for further discussion and subsequent recommendations to the Assembly.

Recommendation III

"The Secretary-General should advise in advance Member States of vacancies at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General as well as of responsibilities related to these positions and qualifications required from candidates."

10. A complete description of the organizational structure and the mandates of each department and office, including the responsibilities of each of the heads of organizational units, are contained in the respective Secretary-General's bulletins and are available to all Member States. As described above, the Secretary-General takes many factors and professional advice into consideration when reviewing candidates for posts at the Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General levels, including geographical distribution and gender considerations and the individual skills, abilities and representational qualifications that are required at this level. Moreover, in respect of advising Member States of vacancies at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General, the Secretary General proceeds in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/226 of 3 April 1997, section II, paragraph 5, which stipulates that he announce all vacancies so as to give equal opportunity to all qualified staff and to encourage mobility, it being understood that the discretionary power of the Secretary-General of appointment and promotion outside the established procedures should be limited to his Executive Office and the under-secretary-general and assistant secretary-general levels, as well as special envoys at all levels.

B. Appointments to posts of the Director (D-2) level

Recommendation IV

"The General Assembly may wish to decide that the modalities of appointment to posts at the D-2 level should be as follows:

"(a) In selecting candidates, whether internal or external, emphasis should be placed on identifying those who are achievement-oriented and have proven managerial competencies and leadership skills (e.g., strategic view; human relations; creative analysis and conceptual thinking; adaptability and flexibility);"

11. It is recommended that the language be modified to follow the language of the managerial competencies that have been defined through a participatory process involving staff and managers throughout the Secretariat. The managerial competencies thus defined are as follows: leadership, vision, empowering others, building trust, managing performance and judgement/ decision-making. For purposes of consistency, it would be preferable to maintain these terms rather than introducing a new set of competencies.

"(b) Newly recruited staff at the D-2 level or holders of fixed-term appointments selected for posts at this level should be granted initial contracts for a period not exceeding five years;"

12. Internal staff who apply and are selected for posts at the D-2 level retain the contractual status they held at the time of their selection for the D-2 post. In general, for external candidates, all such appointments are done on a one- or two-year fixed-term basis. The Secretariat's fixed-term contracts are normally not offered for longer than two or three years.

"(c) Not later than six months before the expiration of the initial contract of a staff member occupying a D-2 post, the position should be advertised both internally and externally;

"(d) The incumbent should be allowed to present his/her candidacy ... provided that performance evaluation reports for his/her service at the post are submitted together with his/her application."

13. Staff members are evaluated for extension of appointment on the basis of their performance.

Recommendation V

"The Secretary-General, in his report on the composition of the Secretariat, should provide information on appointments he has made at the D-2 level with indication of nationality, gender and type of contract granted (new or renewed)."

14. With the exception of the information on contractual types specific to D-2s, all of the information requested is already contained in the report on composition of the Secretariat (see A/55/427, annex, table 1). Information on the percentages of contractual appointments across all categories of staff is also contained in that document. The added value of reporting this information on this one specific category is questionable given the wealth of detailed information already provided.

C. Geographical representation in senior-level positions

Recommendation VI

"The General Assembly may wish to draw the Secretary-General's attention to the continuing inadequate representation of many Member States, particularly developing countries, in senior-level posts and to request him to take measures aimed at improving this situation. It may also wish to invite the Secretary-General to inform the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on these measures within the framework of his report on the composition of the Secretariat."

15. The Secretary-General is fully aware of the need to ensure that as wide a geographical mix as possible is reflected at the senior policy-making levels. These concerns are of utmost importance to him when selecting officials at this level. For appointments at the D-2 level, his Senior Review Group reviews all recommendations from departments to ensure that geographical representation and gender balance have been fully considered along with the provisions of the Charter relative to integrity and performance. As mentioned above, at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels, the issue of geographical representation is of utmost concern. All statistics on geographical representation at those levels are reported to the General Assembly on an annual

basis in the report on the composition of the Secretariat.

Recommendation VII

"The Secretary-General should pay particular attention to the repeated statements by the General Assembly to the effect that no post, including at senior levels, should be considered the exclusive preserve of any Member State or group of States."

16. The Secretary-General is fully aware of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and does not consider any posts as the exclusive preserve of any Member State or group of Member States.

D. Representation of women

Recommendation VIII

"The General Assembly may wish to draw the attention of the Secretary-General to the need to:

"(a) Improve gender balance in posts at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels;

"(b) Place special emphasis on better representation of women from developing countries as well as from countries with economies in transition in senior-level positions."

17. The Secretary-General is committed to improving gender balance at the policy-making levels of the Organization, and his designation of several women as heads of major organizational entities within the Secretariat is a demonstration of that commitment. His recent senior-level appointments of women from a country with an economy in transition and from a developing country continue this trend. He will continue to make such appointments and will continue to report the progress made in his reports on the composition of the Secretariat and on the advancement of women in the Secretariat. Furthermore, the Secretary-General would welcome concrete suggestions from JIU on the broad measures that might be taken to improve the representation of women at senior levels.

E. Appointments to posts of special representative, envoy and related positions

Recommendation IX

"The Secretary-General should make more sustained efforts in order:

"(a) To apply the principle of selecting candidates for the positions of special representative, envoy and to related positions on as wide a geographical basis as possible;

"(b) To ensure at the same time a wider representation of these officials within geographical regions;

"(c) To improve gender balance in these positions."

18. With regard to the appointment of special representatives, envoys and related positions, the Secretary-General would like to point out the particularly sensitive and political nature of those appointments and of the missions those officials head. The Secretary-General has taken note of and endorses the recommendation of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305-S/2000/809) made in this regard, which is that the Secretary-General should systemize the method of selecting mission leaders, beginning with the compilation of a comprehensive list of, inter alia, potential representatives or special representatives of the Secretary-General, within a fair geographic and gender distribution and with input from Member States. To this end, the Secretary-General has formed a senior appointments group to oversee improvement of the selection process.

F. Appraisal of top-level officials in the United Nations Secretariat

Recommendation X

"The General Assembly may wish to request the Secretary-General to report to it biannually on the extent of the application of the performance appraisal system to senior-level officials."

19. The performance appraisal system (PAS) is applicable to all staff, including those who report directly to the Secretary-General (ST/SGB/1999/18).

Beginning in February 2000, the Secretary-General put in place a new instrument that requires the heads of departments to define clearly the goals and results they seek to achieve. This instrument, called the programme management plan, spells out the contributions the head of the department will make to the Organization together with measurable performance indicators for each objective. These objectives have been directly linked to Member States' mandates, as set out in the medium-term plan. The heads of departments also set out their objectives for managing human and financial resources, indicators of achievement and objectives for improving productivity.

20. The Secretary-General has been meeting with each head of department to review plans and the proposed objectives for the forthcoming year. In future years, the review will also cover the achievements of the previous year. It will compare actual performance to the performance indicators established in the previous year and will focus on ways of identifying the reasons for success or failure in order to benefit from the successes and consider, where necessary, any remedial action needed.

21. The value of this management tool lies in the fact that the Secretary-General is using this document as a living instrument to review the progress of work, thereby holding the senior-most managers accountable for their actions and also helping them should they need his support and guidance. In this way, the Secretary-General has institutionalized the accountability framework at the highest management level of the Organization.

22. With respect to other senior levels, the Secretary-General is fully prepared to report biennially to the General Assembly on the extent of the application of PAS to senior-level officials as part of its reporting on the implementation of the overall performance management process, which includes PAS. The extent to which managers are held accountable for all aspects of the process, including work planning, ongoing monitoring of performance, feedback and development of staff, is a crucial element of the human resources reform effort.

G. Senior-level appointments in the United Nations programmes and funds

Recommendation XI

"The General Assembly may wish to call upon the executive heads of the United Nations programmes and funds to give greater importance to ensuring recruitment of staff at senior levels on as wide a geographical basis as possible."

23. The Secretary-General supports this recommendation.